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Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #9

15 Oct 2023

KEY POINTS

- Heavy Israeli bombardments on Gaza, from the air, sea and land, have continued almost uninterrupted. Over the past 24 hours (as of 22:00), there have been Palestinian 455 fatalities in Gaza and 856 injuries, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza.
- Mass displacement from the north to the south of the Gaza Strip has continued since Israel's evacuation order on Friday. By Saturday afternoon, nearly 600,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) were hosted in the central and southern parts of Gaza alone, in increasingly dire conditions; since then, this figure has raised significantly.
- Palestinian armed groups in Gaza continued firing rockets indiscriminately towards Israeli population centres, including at the Tel Aviv metropolitan area. No Israeli fatalities were reported during the past 24 hours (as of 21:00) in this context, but dozens were wounded.
- An almost full evacuation of Sderot city, in southern Israel, was completed today (Sunday). Smaller Israeli communities around Gaza have been fully vacated in previous days, while a large proportion of Ashqelon city's residents have also reportedly left.
- Today (Sunday), Israel partially resumed water supply to the eastern Khan Younis area. Concerns about dehydration and waterborne diseases remain high given the collapse of water and sanitation services, including today's shutdown of Gaza's last functioning seawater desalination plant.
- Fuel reserves at all hospitals across Gaza are expected to last for about additional 24 hours. The shutdown of backup generators would place the lives of thousands of patients at risk.
- On Sunday, the UN Deputy Special Coordinator and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the oPt Lynn Hastings, called for a humanitarian ceasefire.
- In the West Bank, since Saturday afternoon, Israeli forces killed one Palestinian boy and another boy died from wounds sustained previously, bringing the fatality toll by Israeli forces since 7 October to 56 Palestinians, including 15 children.

Residents of Gaza staying in a logistics centre of the United Nations near the Egyptian border. ©Photo by OCHA

HUMANITARIAN OVERVIEW

Hostilities and casualties

Multiple residential buildings in densely populated areas have been targeted and destroyed during the past 24 hours. These includes two airstrikes targeting residential buildings in Jabalia Camp and Deir al Balah Saturday afternoon, reportedly killing 47 people; and two airstrikes on Sunday, west of Rafah and in Tel al Hawa area of Gaza city, killing 28 people, including several children.

Since the start of hostilities, 2,670 Palestinians have been killed and 9,600 have been injured. The fatality toll in Gaza during the eight days of hostilities has already surpassed the total number of fatalities during the 2014 escalation, which lasted for over seven weeks (2,251 Palestinian fatalities). According to the Palestinian Civil Defense, the number of missing people, presumably trapped beneath the rubble may exceed 1,000.

According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, as of 15 October at 8:00, 47 entire families have been killed, amounting to about 500 people.

Human rights organizations have expressed concern over incidents where civilians and civilian objects appear to have been directly targeted by Israeli airstrikes.

As of 21:00 on Sunday, no new Israeli fatalities have been reported. According to official Israeli official sources, at least 1,300 Israelis and foreign nationals have been killed in Israel and at least 3,715 have been injured, the vast majority on 7 October. The fatality toll exceeds the cumulative number of Israelis killed since OCHA began recording casualties in 2005 (nearly 400).

The Israeli military indicated that, so far, it has notified the families of 155 Israelis that are being held in the Gaza Strip. UN Secretary-General António Guterres reiterated in a press article published on Friday, that “all hostages in Gaza must be released” and that “civilians must not be used as human shields.”

According to the Gaza Ministry of Public Works, as of 13 October, 7,000 housing units have been destroyed and 4,887 housing units have been damaged and rendered uninhabitable.

Twenty-four health facilities have been damaged, including six hospitals. Three of the latter in northern Gaza (Beit Hanoun, Hamad Rehabilitation, and Ad Dura) had to be evacuated.

As of 13 October, 144 educational facilities had been hit by airstrikes, including 20 UNRWA schools, of which two were used as emergency shelters for IDPs, and 165 Palestinian Authority (PA) schools, one of which was destroyed. Eleven mosques were targeted and destroyed, and seven churches and mosques were damaged. Water and sanitation facilities have also been severely damaged. As of 12 October, at least six water wells, three water pumping stations, one water reservoir, and one desalination plant serving over 1,100,000 people were damaged.

Displacement

As of 14 October in the afternoon hours, an estimated 600,000 people are displaced to the southern half of Gaza, with about 300,000 people situated in UNRWA designated emergency shelters (DES), and the rest in public facilities and with host families. Since then, this figure has increased significantly. The number of IDPs in Gaza city and northern Gaza cannot be determined due insecurity and constant movement of people.

The hosting capacity at UNRWA's DES in the central and southern areas is overstretched. Many displaced people are sleeping outdoors due to lack of space. This includes a large number of already vulnerable people, including children, the elderly, those requiring medical attention, the disabled, and pregnant women. Water, food and medicines are severely limited. Frustration and tensions among IDPs due to the dire conditions are on the rise.

Today (Sunday), the Israeli military renewed their calls for all residents of Gaza city and Northern Gaza, including those staying in emergency shelters, to relocate south of Wadi Gaza. They indicated that those who travelled on a designated road between 10:00 and 13:00 would not be attacked.

The Secretary-General reiterated on Friday that an immediate and full evacuation is impossible, while the World Health Organization (WHO) spokesperson described an eventual evacuation of hospitals as a "death sentence" for the most vulnerable patients.

Basic services and livelihoods

For the fifth consecutive day, Gaza has been under a full electricity blackout, following Israel's halt of its electricity and fuel supply to Gaza on 7 October, which in turn triggered the shutdown of Gaza's sole power plant. Essential service infrastructure is currently operational via backup generators.

Twenty out of 23 governmental and NGO hospitals are partially operational and continue to treat an average of 1,000 injured patients per day, far exceeding their capacity. Fuel reserves at hospitals are not expected to last longer than 24 hours. The shutdown of backup generators would place the lives of thousands of patients at immediate risk. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) stated that, "hospitals in Gaza risk turning into morgues without electricity."

Today (Sunday), Israel renewed its water supply for one line servicing eastern Khan Younis The precise volume and impact of this supply is still unclear. On the other hand, the remaining seawater desalination plant servicing central and southern Gaza shutdown today due to lack of fuel.

The main suppliers of clean drinking water are now private vendors, which operate small desalination and water purification plants, which are mostly run by solar energy. Some people have resorted to consuming brackish water extracted from agricultural wells. WASH cluster partners estimate that the average water consumption from all sources and for all needs dipped to just three litres per day per person, deepening concerns about dehydration and the outbreak of waterborne diseases, including cholera.

On Sunday, Gaza's only remaining operational wastewater treatment plant (out of five), which relies on solar energy, was forced to shut down due to weather conditions. Consequently, additional amounts of untreated sewage have been discharged to the sea. Additionally, most of the 65 sewage pumping stations are not operational, increasing the risk of sewage flooding. In some areas, sewage and solid waste have been accumulating in the streets, posing health and environmental hazards.

According to officials at the Gaza Power Plant, Israeli authorities have warned that the plant would be targeted if it attempted to resume operations. The Israeli Defense Minister indicated that electricity, fuel and water supply to Gaza would not be restored until the Israeli hostages are released. The Secretary-General stressed on Friday that "crucial life-saving supplies, including fuel, food and water, must be allowed into Gaza".

The blackout has affected food security by disrupting refrigeration, irrigation of crops, and crop incubation devices, thereby negatively impacting livelihoods (poultry, cattle, fish, and other commodities). The increasing number of IDPs has overwhelmed existing resources, leaving many vulnerable families without access to food. Wheat flour reserves are expected to be depleted in less than a week, according to Food Security partners, while only one of five mills is functioning.

The lack of access to fodder and damaged from the airstrikes have taken a toll, with many breeders, primarily small-scale ones, reporting substantial livestock losses, particularly in the poultry sector. Farmers are losing their crops in agricultural lands situated in the east of Khan Yunis and other locations.

Movement and access

The Rafah crossing with Egypt has remained closed for the movement of people and goods. Reportedly the United States, Israel, Egypt, and Qatar, have agreed that the crossing would be open for the evacuation of foreign nationals to Egypt. However, this agreement has not yet been implemented.

The Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings with Israel also remained closed. Referrals for patients and their companions to exit the Gaza Strip to reach their medical appointments in the West Bank and Israel have ceased since 7 October. People from Gaza working in Israel were not able to return home. Hundreds have been detained by Israeli authorities, while others were transferred to the West Bank.

Access to the sea has been prohibited by the Israeli military, and all fishing activity stopped since the hostilities began. Access within 1,000 metres from Israel's perimeter fence remained prohibited, preventing access to large areas of farming lands and, alongside safety concerns, has decreased produce yield.

Humanitarian operations

All humanitarian agencies and personnel have faced major constraints in providing humanitarian assistance, due to airstrikes, movement restrictions and shortages of electricity, fuel, water, medicines and other essential items. The prevailing insecurity is preventing safe access to people in need and essential facilities, such as warehouses.

The WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care has recorded 48 health attacks since the beginning of hostilities, which included the killings of 12 health workers and the injury of 20 others while on duty. At least 12 UNRWA staff were also killed.

Despite these challenging conditions, humanitarian actors are working around the clock to support the most vulnerable. The major operation entails the hosting of IDPs in UNRWA schools, where basic food, medicine and support is provided to retain dignity and a glimmer of hope. Other interventions include the distribution of food and cash assistance to IDPs and emergency fuel to WASH facilities, psychosocial support helplines, and a mass media campaign to raise awareness about the risks of unexploded ordnance (for further detail, see Humanitarian Needs and Responses).

The reach of operations will remain limited without a humanitarian pause, the opening of the crossings with Israel and Egypt and significant funding for humanitarian response

On 12 October, the OPT Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) launched a Flash Appeal calling for US$294 million for 77 humanitarian partners to address the most urgent needs of 1,260,000 people in Gaza and the West Bank. This Flash Appeal will need to be revised given the significant increase in humanitarian needs.

WEST BANK HUMANITARIAN OVERVIEW

Casualties

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli forces have continued for eight consecutive days. Since the start of the hostilities, until 16:00 today (Sunday), Israeli forces have killed 56 Palestinians, including 15 children. An additional five Palestinians were killed by Israeli settlers during two consecutive settler attacks in Qusra (Nablus). Last week was the deadliest week for West Bank Palestinians since OCHA began recording casualties in 2005.

From the afternoon of Saturday to 16:00 on Sunday, Israeli forces shot and killed one Palestinian boy during a settler attack in Beita village (Nablus), and another boy died from wounds sustained on 10 October after being shot by Israeli forces during confrontations near Tulkarm. Additionally, Israeli forces injured 23 Palestinians, bringing the total number of Palestinians injured to 1,173, including at least 113 children. Over 1,000 Palestinians were injured, mostly by Israeli forces, in the context of demonstrations. Some 26 per cent of injuries were caused by live ammunition.

Settler-related violence

Settler violence across the West Bank, especially in Palestinian communities near Israeli settlements, has been on the rise. Since 7 October, OCHA has recorded 70 settler attacks against Palestinians resulting in casualties or property damage, including some where Israeli forces were involved. This represents an average of eight incidents per day, compared with a daily average of three incidents per day since the beginning of this year.

In the past 24 hours, settler violence incidents continued against Palestinian farming and herding communities vulnerable to the risk of forcible transfer in Masafer Yatta area of southern Hebron. Settlers destroyed household infrastructure (tents, water pipes, solar panels) of Palestinian communities that had already left.

Attacks on health care

Since 7 October, WHO has documented 63 attacks against health in the West Bank, including obstruction to delivery of health care; physical violence towards health teams; detention of health staff and ambulances; and militarized search of health assets.

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS & RESPONSES

Protection

Priority Needs

- Psychological first aid (PFA) services, psychological counseling services and psychosocial/recreational/50,000 dignity kits.
- Documentation of violations of International Human Rights Law and Humanitarian Law.
- Supportive tools and devices such as crutches, wheelchairs, earphones, eyeglasses, and medications for the elderly and people with disabilities.

Response to Date

- Ten child protection and Mental Health Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) partners are operating in, and for, Gaza (six in Gaza Strip and four partners in West Bank) providing remote psychosocial support.
- The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) has initiated an emergency mass media campaign through various platforms, including social media and radio stations, to send Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) and Conflict Preparedness and Protection (CPP) messages to as wide a population as possible.
- In the West Bank, the assigned MHPSS Focal Points are responding to settler violence triggers . The MHPSS Coordination Lead Focal Points at governorate levels are intervening as needed.

Shelter

Priority Needs

- Urgent need to provide services and basic Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFI) to(IDPs.
- Provision of shelter NFIs for shelterNon-Food Items and house maintenance for people displaced in urban centers and with host families.
- Provision of shelter cash assistance for IDPs (reintegration package and belongings loss compensation) for at least 3,000 families.

Response to Date

- 270,000 IDPs are hosted at 102 UNRWA schools across Gaza Strip.
- Distribution of 3,900 NFIs in Rafah and Khan Younis including bedding sets and dignity kits.
- Distribution of 820 hygiene kits to displaced families.
- ICRC/PRCS distributed 120NFIs for displaced families.

Health

Priority Needs

- Addressing shortages of medical supplies impacting case management.
- Fuel for hospitals and ambulances are running out.
- Urgent need to restock medical supplies given depletion of stocks in the local market.
- UNRWA have medical points in 53 out of the 108 shelters. The Health Cluster is identifying other partners to support the remaining shelters.
- Health Cluster partners are mobilizing and prepositioning supplies in Egypt.

Response to Date

- Partners continue to procure supplies from the local market to support hospital operations.
- Surge staff remain present in the hospitals supporting case management.
- Ambulances and emergency medical teams continue to operate despite the risk and difficult environment.

Food Security

Priority Needs

- Electricity, fuel, and water sources to maintain agriculture.
- Many shops have food supplies to last less than a week
- Safe access to farms, livestock, fisheries, and other food livelihood.
- Urgent import of fodder.

Response to Date

- The World Food Program (WFP) reached 220,000 displaced people residing in UNRWA shelters, providing canned food and bread.
- 243,291 IDPs received CBT (cash-basedtransfer) for food. Of those, 139,312 have been redeemed.
- WFP is planning to reach 224,900 IDPs in 19 UN shelters in the south of Gaza. In addition, 5 trucks carrying 100 MT of food parcels and 15 MT of fortified biscuits from Dubai are expected to arrive in Arish, Egypt.
- On 13 October, over 135,000 displaced people received fresh bread in shelters in south and central Gaza and few locations in the north.

Education

Priority Needs

- Safe access to schools and communities.

Planned Responses

- Provision of school-based psychosocial support and recreational activities for at least 70,000 children and school staff as soon as the situation allows.
- Emergency rehabilitation for at least 20 damaged schools, following a cluster rapid needs assessment.
- Provision of emergency supplies and learning kits to 10,000 children in DES and 50,000 children in schools once they reopen.
- Provision of catch-up classes, especially to displaced children (at least 20,000 child).

WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene)

Priority Needs

- Provision of clean drinking water to the population.
- Provision of alternative power supply and 20,000 liters/day of emergency fuel to sustain the operation of WASH facilities, along with replenishing the chlorine supply for water treatment plants.
- Support to restore disrupted municipal services, including solid waste management, water, and sanitation operations, as appealed by the Gaza Strip municipalities.

- Delivery of essential WASH services and provisions to IDPs in collective centers, including drinking water and hygiene kits.

Planned Response to Date

- Service hub planning in Raffa Egypt with supply chain from local markets and/or agency stocks (including fuel and bottled water for quick recovery, hygiene kits, water storage bladder tanks, jerrycans, materials for treatment plans) and planning IDP kits for 300,000 people.

- Reviewing and checking feasibility of water trucking operations.

Protection against sexual abuse and exploitation (PSEA) remains a cross-cutting priority for all clusters. The SAWA helpline, reachable at 121 and through WhatsApp at +972 59-4040121 (East Jerusalem at 1-800-500-121), operates 24/7. This toll-free number is widely disseminated across all areas of intervention to report cases of SEA and to facilitate emergency counseling and referrals for affected communities to access life-saving services. The PSEA Network monitors calls daily and will increase the number of counselors if necessary.